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## THE OLD TESTAMENT AND FUTURE LIFE.

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It is proposed to inquire into the real meaning of the question as to the doctrine of the future life of the soul as taught in the Old Testament. "The position of the Old Testament on this question has been a matter of dispute. Expositors, from the older Jews and the Church Fathers down to the present day, have differed as to whether it teaches immortality or not." (Schaff-Herzog, *Ency. of Rel. Knowledge*, Art. *Eschatology*). It is, therefore, not amiss to ask: Is the doctrine of a future life taught in the Old Testament?

Some have no hesitancy in answering this question with a positive *No*; and base their answer mainly upon the fact that the doctrine is not formally stated in the Old Testament. Now, as I have said elsewhere, it is true that the Old Testament does not state the doctrine formally; but this does not imply that therefore the people did not possess the belief in it, any more than that because the doctrine of the Being of God is not formally stated in the Old Testament, they did not believe in the existence of God. (See *Reformed Quar. Rev.*, Oct. 1883, p. 510). The fact, therefore, that the doctrine is not formally stated does not argue that it is not taught.

How explain, if we must answer *no* to the question as to whether the doctrine of a future life was held by Old Testament saints, the evident implications of the belief in a future life, if not the direct statements of it, in such passages as the following: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." (Ps. xvii., 15). "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they rise." (Is. xxvi., 19), &c.?

And again, what mean the words of David concerning his child that died, when he said: "I can go to him, but he cannot return to me," if not a belief in a personal existence hereafter? These words were a comfort to him. Would they have been so had they meant merely that his dead body could be laid by the side of his departed child in the silent tomb, and not that he believed in a future life, where friends would meet friends, and where relationships, broken by death, would be restored?

What mean also the translations of Enoch and Elijah, if not that they continued to live? The Hebrews could not but argue from this that for Enoch and Elijah, at least, there was a "life beyond life," and if for them, is it not equally true for all God's children?

But now apart from this direct testimony, look at the subject in the light of reason. Is it reasonable to answer *no* to the question: Was the doctrine of a future life held by the Old Testament saints? Think one moment of the position which the Jewish nation occupied in the world in regard to the condition of the soul. Who were they? What was the mission of the Jewish nation as compared to the missions of the Oriental and Greek nations in the plan of salvation? They were a people specially chosen of God to receive and perpetuate and develop the revelation of Himself and the doctrine of salvation: "Salvation is of the Jews," said Jesus. In the words of Dr. Gregory their mission was "to receive directly from God, and, in due time, transmit to the whole human race the

only religion of salvation, and therefore the only true world-religion. Everything connected with the history of the Jews had reference to the completion of this one religion for mankind. Each revelation and dispensation, all discipline and punishment, every promise and threatening, their constitution, laws, and worship, every political, civil and religious institution (so far as they were legitimate and proper), tended toward this one goal." (" *Why Four Gospels?*" pp. 30-31). Now, if this was their mission, if they were the custodians of the *only* supernatural revelation ever given to mankind, how is it possible even to suppose that they knew not of a future life? Further still, how can anyone reasonably conceive of their not knowing more than any other nations about a future life? For other nations held to a belief in a future life. The Chaldean and Egyptian nations with which the Hebrews had close dealings held positively to the belief. And there is not a race of human beings on the face of the earth "whose convictions on such subjects are founded on their moral and religious nature, but have in all ages believed in the continued existence of the soul after death." (*Hodge Sys. Theol.*, Vol. III., p. 715). The religions of all civilized races contain the doctrine; and not only is it held by those who live within the pale of Bible influence, but also by those who are utterly destitute of a revelation of it. How strange, how inexplicable would it be, therefore, to think that the Hebrew nation, God's favored people, should not have had this belief. Dr. Hodge says in this connection: "That the Hebrews, God's chosen people, the recipients and custodians of a supernatural revelation, should be the only nation on the face of the earth in whose religion the doctrine of a future state had no place, would be a solecism. It is absolutely incredible, for it supposes human nature in the case of the Hebrews to be radically different from what it is in other men."

And again, if they held not this doctrine, how explain their ideas of the destiny of man more exalted than any other nation, and their high conceptions of man; their aspirations; their hopes; their aims; their words—which all point to a belief in a future life? No other theory but that which holds that the Hebrew people held to a belief in the doctrine of a future life can satisfactorily explain these.

Continuing this *a priori* argument, how can one reasonably suppose, much less believe, that the Hebrews should be the only people who did not observe the fact that everything pertaining to man's soul, points to a continued existence after death? Did not they observe what all thinking men must, that there is such a "clear want of adequacy in the present exquisite arrangement of things to completely satisfy the longings of the spirit" that man cannot but look forward to an immortal life, and an eternity for the soul? Surely they did. For they had higher and more far-reaching longings and hopes and aspirations than any other people,—longings and hopes and aspirations which could not be satisfied with this life, and which they did not expect to be satisfied in this life. Therefore we find that throughout the Old Testament Scriptures "the possessions and enjoyments of earth are always represented as temporary and insignificant, not adapted to meet the soul's necessities; they were taught not to envy the wicked in their prosperity, but to look to God as their portion; they were led to say: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee'; and, 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.' In the Old Testament, the righteous

are always represented as strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, whose home and whose reward are not in this world; that their portion is in another world, and, therefore, that it is better to be the humblest and most afflicted of God's people than to be the most prosperous of the wicked." (*Hodge Sys. Theol.*, Vol. III., pp. 716-717).

To answer *no*, therefore, to the question: Was the doctrine of a future life held by Old Testament believers, is unreasonable and unwarrantable. What must we answer then? Unqualifiedly, *Yes*? I think so, when we mean by it that the Old Testament Scriptures teach the doctrine. But hardly so, when we mean by it that it is fully and satisfactorily taught. If it had been, then what means it when it is said by Paul that Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light through the gospel? For he brought this to light first of all to the Jews, God's own people. We must therefore seek for an answer which satisfies all conditions of the case.

What is that answer? It is this: Though the doctrine of a future life was held by the Old Testament people, yet *what* that future life is, was not fully and satisfactorily known by them. In other words, though it was revealed to them, so that they could not and did not doubt it, *that* there was a future life for the soul, yet they had no clear knowledge of *what* it was until Jesus Christ came to bring it to light. Now, there is a great difference between knowing merely *that* a thing is, and knowing in addition to this also *what* it is. We cannot think that the *fact* of a future life was gradually developed in the mind of the Hebrews, but that it was held from the beginning. But a knowledge of what that future life is, the fact of which they doubted not, was gradually developed and was never fully known until the revelation of it was distinctly and blessedly given by Jesus Christ through the gospel. "The belief in immortality is elemental." "The Master of the Universe has built it in the structure of our minds," says Emerson. Joseph Cook says "The expectation of existence after death is an organic or constitutional instinct." And therefore the Hebrews must, unless they were different from other people, have had a knowledge of the fact of a future life. When Rev. Mr. Rowlands says, therefore, as he does in *THE OLD TESTAMENT STUDENT* for May, 1884, (p. 336) that "there were other truths that must be taught the race before this great spiritual one could be appreciated or apprehended," and that there was a "preparation of heart and mind required to conceive of and accept the doctrine of Life Everlasting," if he means here the mere fact of a future life, we doubt the correctness of his statement. If he means, however, that there must be other truths taught the race before the great spiritual truth as to *what* that future life shall be, could be appreciated or apprehended,—that to conceive of and accept the doctrine of Life Everlasting, as revealed by Jesus Christ through the gospel, there was to be a preparation of heart and mind, we agree with him. The belief in the mere fact of a future life being elemental, it could be easily conceived of and accepted; but before any people can have any distinct knowledge of what the future life will be they must have an objective supernatural revelation of it. For as some one has well said, before we can "behold with an unwavering confidence the radiant home on the farther side, a light 'that never shone on land or sea' must come to us. The opened heavens alone can give it. The truth must be here revealed, not argued out." That light came not suddenly,—the race was not ready for its glorious rays; before it came there was to be, by wise and strange providences, a prep-

aration of heart and mind for its appearing. When, in the "fullness of time" Jesus Christ came to make the valley luminous, the world was ready to hear of the house of God where are many mansions, and of places prepared in ever increasing blessedness and glory for the trusting, hoping, loving child of God; for "life and immortality were brought to light by Jesus Christ, through the gospel."

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### ➤GENERAL NOTES.◀

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**History and the Bible.**—Nothing in our days is more wonderful, not even the colossal growth of natural science, than the fresh start of history. Everywhere the structure of historic literature is rising anew on the basis of archæology, and even more than this: for as in the Church of St. Clement at Rome, deeper, more ancient, and hitherto unsuspected chambers have been brought to light, so the sagacious labors of antiquary and scholar have now recovered whole empires, such as the first kingdom of Chaldæa, and the primæval Elam, and a language, civilization, literature and polity fresh risen from the dust of four thousand years. We need not speak of Egypt, whose triumph has been already celebrated. Still Egypt is daily yielding fresh spoils; and in her records the germs even of European history are with keen delight recognized by the veterans of classic lore.

There is scarcely a study of more absorbing interest than is afforded by this new birth of history. It enlists students of many sciences, enrolling them in one guild, whose brethren learn at last duly to honor one another. In the cave geologist meets archæologist over the engraven mammoth-tusk. Hither comes the artist too, smitten with surprise at the genial freedom of some pristine Landseer's sketch. Here the zoologist recognizes with delight the shaggy fell of fur and hair and the gigantic sweep of tusk, which authenticate at once the subject and the savage artist's fidelity.

Over the prisms and tablets of Babylonia stand men of science and of literature in equal rapture. Queen Victoria's astronomer catechizes the astronomer royal of King Sargina, contemporary probably with Abraham. The scholar of Oxford, forsaking awhile his Bodleian, revels in the archives of Kouyunjik. The veteran ethnologist of London devotes himself to the life-like statuary of earliest Egypt, *spirantia signa*; and the poet of the nineteenth century honors as he best may the "noble rage" of Pentaür, and pores with wonder over the descent of Ishtar into the "place of no return." The archæologist becomes the judge, and often the vindicator, of the aspersed annalist of old time. The "father of pickaxes" avenges the quarrel of the "father of history;" Herodotus, Manetho, Berosus, even Livy, even Josephus, raise their honored brows from amidst the dust of exploration with laurels greener than ever.

But this is not our chief point. There is one venerable collection of records, one "Bibliotheca," which professes divinely to make known the "purpose of the ages." It is either historical, or else, as men euphemistically say, "unhistorical;" which means fabulous.

How do these chronicles bear the collation with independent and authentic evidence now borne by contemporary records?